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SUBJECT: SENATOR WEBB MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER HUN SEN

REF: STATE 83598

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CAROL A. RODLEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Senator Jim Webb concluded a successful one-day visit to Cambodia August 18 on a positive note during a meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen in which there was general agreement on new ways to approach Burma. Webb detailed his interest in the region and in stronger relations with Cambodia. Hun Sen repeated support for the ASEAN position on Burma, saying that Aung San Suu Kyi should be freed, the military government should be dissolved, and elections held. He agreed that ASEAN should do more to influence the Burmese junta, noted that sanctions could only drive Burma into the arms of China and India, and outlined possible options for Burma toward planned 2010 elections. Hun Sen praised warming relations with the United States, citing CT cooperation, the Peace Corps, and a Cambodia-hosted GPOI exercise in 2010. He also related Cambodia's efforts to achieve resolution of a border dispute with Thailand by peaceful means. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Accompanied by the Ambassador, Senator Webb called on the Prime Minister in his National Assembly office, where he was joined by MFA Secretary of State Ouch Borith, Senior Minister and National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) Deputy Director Om Yentieng, and foreign relations advisor Srey Thamarong. Recounting his 40 years experience in the region and noting his current position as Chairman of the SFRC East Asian and Pacific Affairs Sub-Committee, Senator Webb explained his abiding interest in maintaining U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, particularly in the five mainland countries he is visiting on this trip. He said that the new importance placed on the region was shared by fellow Senators and noted that he would report to the Secretary upon his return, especially on means to improve bilateral relations. Based on his long experience in Vietnam, he asserted that the U.S. needed to engage Cambodia in the same way it did in Vietnam 12 years ago. While the present state of relations with Cambodia was "very good," he underscored that the U.S. and Cambodia were set to mature into a more positive and productive relationship.

13. (C) Hun Sen thanked the Senator for his interest in Cambodia and the region, noting that since President Obama took office there has been a noticeable improvement in American interest in Southeast Asia. Recalling former President Clinton's past visit to Phnom Penh and his recent success in North Korea, Hun Sen attributed the more intense focus on Asia to new leadership in the U.S. and also to the continued interest in fighting terrorism on the global stage. Citing his three sons' experience in CT-related military endeavors -- one leading the U.S.-supported National Counter Terrorism Security Forces (NCTSF) and another studying at the U.S. National Defense University -- he said that relations between Cambodia and the U.S. were at a high point.

New Embassy and Old Kerry Mission: Strong Bilateral Ties

14. (C) Hun Sen remarked on the new embassy compound (NEC) next to Phnom Penh's historic Wat Phnom as a tangible indicator of deepening relations. Before, the USG never owned property in Cambodia, he said. And if it were anyone but the American government making the request for such a historic site, he said that the government would likely have not allowed an embassy to be built there. He recalled the difficult U.S.-Cambodia relationship in the 1960's and early 1970's, when Cambodian youths saw the American embassy as a symbol of hatred and were incited to burn it down, noting that he was one of those youths. Now, nearly forty years later, the embassy is a sign of a permanent U.S. presence welcomed by all Cambodians, and the government now only wished to protect it so that the U.S. could broaden its work in Cambodia.

15. (C) The Prime Minister conveyed his regards to SFRC Chairman John Kerry, whose helpful mission to Cambodia a decade ago was cited as another example of enduring ties. Hun Sen recalled Kerry's two successes with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal: developing a new "super-majority" vote formula that helped define the hybrid court (with a majority of national judges) on terms acceptable to the UN, and the implementation of a Pre-Trial Chamber to decide on the scope of prosecutions. The formulas Senator Kerry helped develop have turned out to be significant to the procedures of the court, he said, concluding that Senator Kerry had always sought the means to make the court a success.

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Burma: Flexibility a Success

16. (C) Hun Sen praised Senator Webb for his successful trip to Burma, noting that he had not been able to see both Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi during his own previous visits. The additional success in obtaining the release of an American prisoner showed that it was not at all an ordinary mission. This success was based on a more flexible position resulting in "no loss at all" to the U.S., Hun Sen said.

17. (C) Senator Webb recounted his last trip to Burma eight years ago when a business run by an American friend was suffering in part due to sanctions, with consequences being felt by the local Burmese staff his friend had trained. Looking at Burma through the prism of his experience in Vietnam, the Senator opined that Vietnam's greater exposure to the outside world had been better for the Vietnamese people than when trade sanctions were imposed. He is now bringing the same approach to Burma, he explained. Just as in Vietnam, he was trying to speak to all parties in Burma and to deliver the same message consistently. He believed the Burmese government understood this approach, which is why he was able to see both Tan Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi.

Options for Burma's Future

18. (C) Senator Webb explained that he understood from meetings in Bangkok that ASEAN leaders were considering sending a joint letter to leadership in Burma seeking amnesty for Aung San Suu Kyi. The Senator urged Hun Sen to consider joining in that letter. Recounting that it was difficult for other ASEAN nations to have a dialogue with Burma's leadership, Hun Sen said that Cambodia adopted the ASEAN position on next steps for Burma: release Aung San Suu Kyi, get rid of the military government, and embrace democracy. However, he underscored that sanctions were of no use to ASEAN's interests; they have caused the group to have less influence over developments in Burma, and have pushed Burma closer to China and India.

¶9. (C) On the upcoming elections, Hun Sen outlined two options: (1) release ASSK and allow her to participate in elections; or, (2) encourage elections with participation by Aung San Suu Kyi's party: the National League for Democracy (NLD). He asserted that the first option is preferable, for both Burma and ASEAN, but at the very least, Burma must hold elections with the participation of NLD. Then all can say that a vote for NLD is a vote for Aung San Suu Kyi. If her party were to win the election, then it could amend the constitution to release her. Hun Sen added that even if under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi should allow her party to participate because it would benefit from her network of support throughout the country.

¶10. (C) Paraphrasing points from reftel, Senator Webb agreed that Burma should release Aung San Suu Kyi and at the same time call on her party to participate in elections. Such a move might give the government credibility, he noted. Even if the party chose not to participate, the world would be aware of the circumstances, he added. More importantly, there was great significance to ASEAN saying something about the issue. The top leadership of Burma is very isolated, and Senator Webb emphasized the value of their hearing ASEAN views. Hun Sen replied that ASEAN leaders always try to share their views with Burma and that they tried to help push Burma's leaders. Although in the past ASEAN could not speak without offending Burma, now they will work in a concerted effort because there is only one year left before the planned elections.

Cambodia's Future With Thailand and the United States

¶11. (C) Turning to Cambodia, Hun Sen noted that the nation shared a different fate from Vietnam and Laos in that after the Indochina war, Cambodians suffered under a regime of genocide. Phnom Penh 30 years ago had no people. Now, only 11 years after the end of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia was beginning to emerge into a more sustained period of peace and stability. His government was committed to rebuilding the country, working with donors, and developing a nation run by the rule of law.

¶12. (C) As for its border dispute with Thailand, Hun Sen said that Cambodia was trying to be patient and to solve the

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border problems by peaceful means. While the troops are trying to shake hands, have celebrations together, and avoid armed clashes, the RGC was looking at "the whole jungle and not just one tree." First, Cambodia was trying to contain the border dispute to just one area. Secondly, Cambodia was actively promoting cross-border exchanges, tourism, trade and investment with Thailand. Cambodia was waiting for the Thai parliament to adopt agreed-upon measures to re-deploy troops now at the border, to begin a program of landmine removal, and to work together on border demarcation. (NOTE: These measures have been adopted in bilaterally negotiated joint communiques that have received RGC approval and reportedly await only the approval of the Thai parliament. END NOTE.)

¶13. (C) Hun Sen then praised the evolution of Cambodian-United States relations. Again referring to his youth when Cambodians were incited to demonstrate against the American embassy, he highlighted that now Cambodian youth are being taught by Peace Corps volunteers who live alongside them. Cambodian goods are now widely available in American markets, and the Prime Minister asked Senator Webb to continue to support the import of Cambodian goods and to encourage American investment in order to help employment in Cambodia. He also cited progress in other areas. Next year, Cambodia would play host to many nations participating in the GPOI Capstone exercises, largely with the help of the United States. Cambodia also joined cooperatively in counter-terrorism efforts, such as a regional CT seminar

sponsored by the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS) which he had helped open with the Ambassador the day before.

Aid with PROTECT Act Cases

¶14. (C) Hun Sen told Senator Webb and the Ambassador that he agreed to the Embassy's request to remove three Americans to the U.S. to face charges of illicit sexual conduct under the PROTECT Act. Based on advice from the RGC Ministry of Justice, Hun Sen clarified that the U.S. should seek the "return" of the individuals under escort by U.S. law enforcement authorities, rather than their "expulsion." The Ambassador thanked Hun Sen for his concurrence, and promised expeditious follow-up on the U.S. side.

¶15. (C) Senator Webb and Hun Sen concluded with an exchange of pleasantries in Vietnamese. Hun Sen remarked that he learned his Vietnamese while in a Vietnamese jail in 1977 (NOTE: just after fleeing from the Khmer Rouge Eastern Zone to escape KR purges. END NOTE), and noted that Senator Webb's Vietnamese was better than his own.

¶16. (C) COMMENT: Hun Sen clearly was prepared to engage productively on Burma, and sees a role for the RGC as a bridge between the Burmese junta and ASEAN given Cambodia's own progress toward democracy since the 1991 Paris Peace Accords. On the bilateral relationship, Hun Sen hit all the high marks and was clearly motivated to stay on message and outline a positive vision for Cambodia's future. Senator Webb's overall presentation -- especially his emphasis on democracy in Burma -- provided Hun Sen with welcome insight about Washington's engagement in Southeast Asia. The Senator's approach to engagement likely was helpful in securing agreement to turn over custody of three Americans to U.S. law enforcement after several weeks of ponderous RGC consideration. It has been nearly two years since the last Congressional visit to Cambodia. Senator Webb's visit and his practical engagement throughout the course of a single day has likely reinforced both the equilibrium and depth of the bilateral agenda so that, while we understand clearly we will not always agree, our objectives for the future of the country and the region are not in doubt.

RODLEY